The Battle for Objective Area Alpha

Lieutenant Colonel Scott R. McMichael, U.S. Army, Retired;
Colonel Peter J. Zielinski, U.S. Army; and
Colonel Brian Zahn, U.S. Army

USING THE STORY of a battle as a device for illuminating important themes and lessons regarding the art of war is a time-honored practice. In the example here, the battle is in the future. The theme is tactical operations. The goal is to present a picture of how the future Objective Force will fight at the tactical level.

The scenario is simple and familiar. A U.S. ally is attacked by a regional aggressor and is in danger of being overrun. Time is of the essence. The aggressor hopes for a quick victory that would make external intervention more difficult. The United States understands that the longer it delays, the more advantages accrue to the adversary to achieve its strategic objectives and to prepare more fully to defeat intervention.

Faithful to its commitments, the United States responds immediately to counter the aggressor while building a coalition of like-minded states. The first phase of the joint campaign—initial entry operations—has been completed, and the joint task force (JTF) is preparing to seize the initiative.

Entry Operations

After returning from face-to-face meetings with local police authorities, Colonel Ralph Donnelly, commander of the 1st Combined Arms Brigade (CAB), focused on the displays in his command vehicle. He reviewed the courses of action (COA) the staff had just completed in response to the digitized operation order (OPORD) and operational graphic received earlier from division headquarters. The brigade had been in country for just 10 days, and already, the joint force was transitioning from an initial defensive posture to offensive operations.

The JTF commander directed the brigade—the initial maneuver formation in the joint force flow—to deploy as rapidly as possible to defend the ground approaches to the host-nation (HN) capital. The brigade, with joint air support, was to prevent the seizure of the capital.

Deploying by multiple means, the brigade surprised the enemy with the speed, location, and power of its projection into the HN capital region. Three of its six combat battalions, with the brigade headquarters, deployed by air to unimproved airstrips and unprepared landing areas near the capital. They bypassed the main commercial airport and military air base that the enemy had targeted effectively with improved, long-range precision munitions. The other three battalions deployed via shallow-draft, high-speed sealift under the deputy commander's control, coming ashore near several small fishing towns about 200 kilometers from the capital. They also avoided the main seaport, which had been subject to long-range enemy interdiction.

Deploying in combined arms unit configurations with integrated sustainment packages eliminated the requirement for reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) within an assembly area and enabled all six battalions to move quickly from debarkation into pre-planned defensive positions near the capital. In doing so, they surprised and destroyed the enemy's advanced elements in the near approaches to the city. Nearly simultaneously, an infantry regiment from the Marine expeditionary brigade sea base deployed to block enemy advances along the littoral.

Donnelly's command group included the temporary attachment of two observers from the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) at Fort Leavenworth. The commander wanted to capture all of the significant operational lessons during the campaign. He and the CALL team had discussed the extraordinary level of strategic responsiveness and versatility the new strategic-lift platforms provided. Those capabilities, plus the streamlined force structure of the Objective Force, its lighter platforms, and reduced logistic infrastructure, with substantial elements of the overall force remaining outside the joint operations area (JOA), enabled the brigade to complete its multi-modal deployment

within 96 hours. The brigade then moved immediately off the ramp to fight its way into initial defensive operations.

The commander stressed the importance of improvements in joint interoperability with respect to command, control, and communications and intelligence (C3I) systems. These systems, with en route planning and rehearsal, permitted the commander to do several tasks. He could see the deployment status of each element of the brigade; receive and automatically distribute frequent updates of the enemy and friendly situation in the JOA; and war game several initial-entry COAs while en route. In fact, en route situational awareness across the joint force allowed the JTF commander to redirect one of the air-delivered battalions into a fall-back air strip when it became clear that the enemy advance would place one of the planned aerial ports of debarkation within enemy artillery range.

Joint air and maritime power was critical to the success of entry operations. These forces, including the integrated air/missile defense network, were largely responsible for overcoming enemy anti-access measures and for setting the conditions for early entry ground forces through attrition of the enemy's air and maritime power, long-range precision engagement capabilities, and forward immediate-action drill systems. Information operations—focused on reducing the enemy's ability to maintain actionable visibility of U.S. force flow, timing, and intent—blinded, confused, and deceived the enemy. Information operations included denial of air space to the enemy's forward reconnaissance aircraft, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); interruption of satellite feeds; computer network attack aimed at reducing the enemy's ability to collect and process information and exercise battle command; and deception regarding entry points and timing.

Overall, these shaping operations allowed the rapid introduction of the 1st CAB, which immediately expanded the lodgment area and moved to close off approach routes to the capital city. Organic joint linkages through interoperable battle command and intelligence networks permitted the brigade to coordinate directly for joint fires and to receive near-continuous information updates in the short interim before the arrival of the division early entry command post. Coordination with local HN military and police forces and previously deployed U.S. special operations forces (SOF) elements strengthened the brigade's ability to guard against unconventional threats detected through human intelligence (HUMINT) sources.

The result of this integrated joint entry operation was remarkable. Despite the absence of strategic surprise—the enemy clearly had visibility of U.S. deployment preparations via HUMINT and the news media—the speed of entry operations allowed the joint task force to achieve operational surprise, beating the enemy to one of the key initial objectives. Although the enemy had occupied a significant portion of the HN territory, the denial of capture of its political center as a result of the Objective Force's deployment compelled the enemy to reconsider his campaign goals. Moreover, as the joint task force rapidly built joint combat power, the enemy found that his vulnerability to air- and ground-based precision strike forced him to abandon large-scale maneuver, which restricted his offensive operations to periods of limited visibility.

Information operations—focused on reducing the enemy's ability to maintain actionable visibility of U.S. force flow, timing, and intent—blinded, confused, and deceived the enemy. Information operations included denial of air space to the enemy's forward reconnaissance aircraft, including UAVs; interruption of satellite feeds; computer network attack aimed at reducing the enemy's ability to collect and process information and exercise battle command; and deception regarding entry points and timing.

Within a short time, these disadvantages forced the enemy to shift his focus to consolidating current gains and to assume the defense, first locally near the capital, then more broadly across the entire force. Although he might have made a major effort to invest the capital and push through the brigade, the cost would have been great, with no assurance of success, given the rapid closure of the additional brigades comprising the initial Objective Force division's air-ground task force.

The enemy adopted a defensive strategy, hoping to draw out the conflict and make the United States pay a high price in time, casualties, and resources. In essence, the high level of strategic responsiveness and the synchronized introduction of the U.S. joint contingency force precluded the enemy from achieving a critical early objective and forced him to fall back to a less certain strategy.

Donnelly reminded the CALL team of the difference between this entry operation and that of Operation Desert Storm: "The world has really changed since the Gulf War. I was the executive officer (XO) of a Bradley infantry company that was part of the first heavy division to deploy. We waited weeks for strategic transport and logistic structure to fall into place, followed by more delay when we finally

The enemy force was largely a 1990s-vintage mechanized army with small air and naval forces, but it possessed some advanced niche capabilities with respect to long-range fires, communications, target acquisition, and first-generation UAVs. U.S. intelligence reports assessed enemy training readiness and leadership as above average compared to other regional forces, but still short of U.S. standards.

arrived because of our time-consuming RSOI and then our forward movement into initial defensive positions. During that time, the only maneuver forces on the ground were 82d Airborne units holding a thin line in the desert. Frankly, we were fortunate that Saddam Hussein was not a more aggressive military commander because it would have been near impossible to hold that line against a mechanized advance."

Seizing the Initiative

With the first division's task force of four brigades fully closed, the second division's task force closing fast, and the remainder of the Marine force en route, the JTF commander intended to seize the initiative from the enemy. He studied the enemy dispositions displayed on the joint common operating picture (COP) and thought about the updates he had received during alert and deployment.

The enemy force was largely a 1990s-vintage mechanized army with small air and naval forces, but it possessed some advanced niche capabilities with respect to long-range fires, communications, target acquisition, and first-generation UAVs. U.S. intelligence reports assessed enemy training readiness and leadership as above average compared to other regional forces, but still short of U.S. standards.

The enemy fought best in conventional mounted scenarios, employing mass and momentum against his overmatched neighbors. However, the enemy had been observed over the past several years to have developed increasing competence in decentralized maneuver by avoiding patterns and templates coupled with coordinated indirect-fire strikes that massed effects from dispersed units. Every indicator pointed to an increasingly sophisticated operational style, balancing offense and defense, with investment in the C3 and ISR systems necessary to support complex operations. However, the authoritarian nature of the regime with its endemic barriers to initiative and independent thought naturally stifled and limited the pace of progress.

Although hoping to avoid U.S. intervention in the conflict, the enemy had nevertheless prepared for confrontation. He had a good sense of his own strengths and weaknesses, vis-à-vis U.S. forces, and he knew that he had little chance of sustaining offensive operations in the face of U.S. joint precision strikes. Assuming the defense, he had dispersed his forces and occupied mutually supporting, networked defensive positions anchored by combined arms strongpoints. Many were based within the sanctuary of built-up areas and complex terrain. He was actively fortifying and stockpiling, with special effort toward building redundant, resilient communications networks. He employed deception widely and was husbanding his indirect-fire capability for focused fire strikes against lucrative U.S. targets. His disposition was organized to deny the best air and ground avenues of approach. His defense of these approaches was further strengthened by the dispersal of dismounted infantry, antiarmor, and man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS). By and large, his fighting platforms and fire units matched U.S. capabilities in range. This parity gave advantage, in general, to the side that shot first.

Overall, the enemy presented a tough nut to crack—a complex systemology with no single point of failure within the defensive scheme. Fortunately, the rapid deployment of Objective Force units limited the time available to the enemy to strengthen defenses. Long-range precision fires would generate some significant attrition against the enemy but would fall far short of decisive effects and would likely produce excessive collateral damage, a result that the host nation desperately hoped to avoid. Ultimately, this enemy would have to be destroyed in detail by ground combined arms battalions, or he would have to be flushed into the open and destroyed by all-source precision fires.

Instead of a 20th-century campaign of attrition and deliberately sequenced operations, however, the JTF commander intended to pursue a campaign of dislocation and disintegration through joint simultaneous engagement focused against key capabilities and forces within the enemy systemology. The combination of joint precision strike, to keep the enemy dispersed and relatively immobile, and the all-arms capabilities of the Objective Force, to root out and destroy those forces, would afford the enemy no rest or relief and no means of responding effectively to a relentless, multidimensional assault.

After extensive supporting analysis, the joint commander concluded that at this point in the campaign, he could directly attack several elements of the enemy's military center of gravity. This would include key enemy forces to the east of the capital, the lines of communications (LOC) that supported

Huba Wass de Czege

Artist's conception of Theater Support Vessels and helicopters utilizing streamlined external-load technology conducting landings at a remote location.

The other three battalions deployed via shallow-draft, high-speed sealift under the deputy commander's control, coming ashore near several small fishing towns about 200 kilometers from the capital. They also avoided the main seaport, which had been subject to long-range enemy interdiction. Deploying in combined arms unit configurations with integrated sustainment packages eliminated the requirement for RSOI within an assembly area and enabled all six battalions to move quickly from debarkation into pre-planned defensive positions near the capital.

those forces, and two operating bases located within enemy territory (shielded within urban areas) that anchored enemy LOCs. The JTF commander's ground campaign called for two Objective Force divisions to conduct simultaneous, noncontiguous major operations against enemy forces disposed within the host nation to split those forces into progressively smaller fragments. Simultaneously, joint fires would continue deep interdiction, support to ground operations, and targeting of key enemy capabilities such as battle command and ISR nodes; long-range artillery and missile forces; and logistic elements. Also, Marine Corps amphibious forces would complete deployment ashore to secure the littoral and the right flank of the land area of operations (AO), presenting a parallel threat to the enemy's littoral. Subsequently, advancing Objective Force formations would maneuver laterally to cut LOCs and dislocate enemy forces, with operational maneuver by air of one or more brigades directly against the enemy operating bases just across the international boundary. As these operations succeeded, enemy forces occupying territory north and west of the capital would become increasingly dislocated, irrelevant, exposed, and in danger of encirclement.

The Brigade Order

The abbreviated OPORD and operational graphic that the brigade had received laid out a brigade AO extending over a 75- by 100-kilometer area east of the capital—a large area to cover even with six combat battalions assigned. The mission required the brigade to destroy two brigades of the enemy's 12th Infantry Division (ID) (Mechanized (M)) and other supporting forces and prepare to conduct a second battle without pause in a major reorientation to the north to cut LOCs and isolate the remainder of the enemy's 15th Corps. Two sister brigades would be conducting simultaneous attacks against the enemy's 10th and 11th ID (M) (15th Corps) farther to the northeast, with similar follow-on missions. Host-nation forces would follow and deal with bypassed and remnant enemy elements.

Per brigade battle rhythm, Donnelly used the afternoon secure video-teleconference to issue his attack order to his six subordinate battalion commanders and to the brigade staff.

"Gentlemen, as you know, our mission is to destroy the 34th and 35th mechanized brigades within the enemy 12th ID (M) and continue the attack north to cut enemy LOCs, thereby isolating the 15th Corps

while the 2d and 3d Brigades conduct simultaneous, noncontiguous attacks. You have collaborated directly with the staff and with me during the planning process, so it will come as no surprise that I have selected COA 3 for execution.

"As you can see on your command displays, this COA designates four battalion objective areas (OA), designated A through D, within the brigade AO. Each OA incorporates one or more enemy battalions dispersed within integrated strongpoints. Because the battalion OAs also include key enemy C3 nodes, critical ISR, and supporting fire units, my assessment is that their seizure will render both enemy brigades largely ineffective, negating any requirement to engage all enemy division elements in the brigade area.

The mission required the brigade to destroy two brigades of the enemy's 12th ID(M) and other supporting forces and prepare to conduct a second battle without pause in a major reorientation to the north to cut LOCs and isolate the remainder of the enemy's 15th Corps. . . . Donnelly used the afternoon secure video-teleconference to issue his attack order to his six subordinate battalion commanders and to the brigade staff.

"As the 1st through the 4th Future Combat System (FCS) battalions attack the four primary objectives, I intend to vault the 5th Battalion by air into temporary defensive positions in the rear of the enemy division to block withdrawal or reinforcing elements, secure key ground transportation nodes, and pre-position the battalion for the follow-on engagements. The 6th Battalion, uncommitted at the beginning of the battle, will support the rest of you with non-line of sight (NLOS) fires and simultaneously maneuver in depth. Brigade reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition elements will lead, to initiate the follow-on battle to the north without pause (in coordination with the 5th Battalion) and maintain pressure on the enemy. I will move with the 6th Battalion.

"I estimate that the initial battle will be completed within 36 to 48 hours, but we are going to continue to advance and to transition immediately into the subsequent set of engagements. Therefore, I want you to conserve on-board munitions, consistent, of course, with the way the battle unfolds and without compromising freedom of action, effectiveness, or survivability. Shoot for a goal of 50 percent with respect to both line of sight (LOS) and NLOS rounds. Fuel should not be a problem, considering the distances we have to traverse and the speed with which we expect to break down the enemy's defenses and shatter his coherence.

"You can see from the task organization that the division has allocated considerable support to the brigade battle. In just a moment, the fires/effects coordinator will run through how the division will cover the counterfire mission, support attacks with planned fires, and shape the battle in terms of isolating and neutralizing other enemy elements within the brigade AO. We will discuss using planned and on-call joint fires for the air assault and deep maneuver, as well as aviation and armed UAV assets. This support will enhance freedom of action, support rapid movement to the objective areas, and help conserve on-board munitions for the next fight.

"Of course, the enemy could prove tenacious. We might run into a few surprises although I think our

The Future Combat System—Today

The Future Combat System (FCS) is the networked system of systems that will serve as the core building block within all tactical maneuver echelons to develop overmatching combat power, sustainability, agility, and versatility necessary for full-spectrum military operations. It is composed of a family of advanced, highly mobile, networked space-, air- and ground-based maneuver, maneuver support, and sustainment systems that will include manned and unmanned platforms. The FCS also includes suites of information technologies, RSTA networks, and battle command systems that will permit the tactical unit to operate at a level of synchronization heretofore unachievable.

The largest FCS systems will be lighter than current mechanized systems with each element possessing common or multifunctional characteristics. FCS units must achieve all organizational characteristics in the Army Vision.

Many FCS platforms will be multifunctional and modular, combining two or more tactical functions such as assault and indirect fires, air defense, forms of RSTA, network communications, battle command, and mobility support. Other platforms, such as unmanned aerial and ground vehicles might be single function. FCS platforms will be able to engage enemy forces with LOS and NLOS fires at extended ranges.

— Future Combat System Mission Needs Statement, U.S. Army Adjutant General School, Fort Jackson, SC

US Army

The enemy fought best in conventional mounted scenarios, employing mass and momentum against his overmatched neighbors . . . [and] had been observed over the past several years to have developed increasing competence in decentralized maneuver. . . . Instead of a 20th-century campaign of attrition and deliberately sequenced operations, however, the JTF commander intended to pursue a campaign of dislocation and disintegration through joint simultaneous engagement focused against key capabilities and forces within the enemy systemology.

situational understanding at this time is top drawer. We know how tough it can be to clear and secure urban areas, even small ones. I have directed the deputy commander to conduct preliminary planning in case we have to cycle battalions through mission staging during transition. The 1st Battalion will have the toughest engagement. I want to have at least one fully replenished combat battalion for the turn to the north, so I want the 1st Battalion, as an exception, to plan from the start for replenishment before its follow-on engagement. Division will configure sustainment pulses for on-call replenishment if anyone else is delayed or exceeds consumption goals when coming out of initial engagements.

"You all understand how important it is to maintain and update situational awareness during combat operations. I want you to remain cognizant of how the entire brigade battle is proceeding in case we have to make in-stride adjustments, either to respond to a challenge or to exploit an opportunity. This is going to be a fluid battle. I am counting on the XO, as my chief information officer, to maneuver the brigade C3 and ISR network to ensure continuous support. We must keep our eyes on everything in the brigade AO and be prepared to respond to any unforeseen development, even though our focus is the battalion OAs. Each battalion must use its organic RSTA to fill in the gaps that remote sensors cannot see and to fight for information when required. As stated earlier, brigade RSTA will focus on the deep maneuver and develop the situation for subsequent engagements.

"Let's run the animation to show how I see the flow of the battle, particularly the synchronization of air and ground maneuver and the fire plan. Then we will answer questions on the overall concept and commander's intent before we move on through the rest of the order. I want to finish this in the next 20 minutes, then get graphics and collaborative briefbacks from the battalions within another hour. Our attack begins 8 hours from now."

The division allocated considerable support to the brigade battle, including a two-battalion fires/effects task force, sufficient aviation lift for the air assault, two Comanche reconnaissance/attack companies, an armed UAV platoon, plus bridging and breaching assets. Given the light enemy air threat and the division's responsibility for the local air and missile defense (AMD) umbrella, division retained control of its AMD assets, particularly to ensure support for

tactical air assaults and the deeper operational maneuver. The combination of joint (airborne laser), division (ground-based laser and missile), and organic battalion assets (FCS-mounted, short-range missiles) would be employed to deal with the enemy's low-level UAV and rotary-wing threats through the Integrated Airspace Control Network.

FCS Battalion Operations

Lieutenant Colonel Rick Reagan, 1st Battalion commander, switched off the video link and studied the battalion objective area—OA Alpha—more closely. The center of mass was approximately 30 kilometers from his current dispositions. The OA represented the heart of the enemy brigade's webbed defense. Irregularly shaped, it included the better part of two enemy mechanized battalions, three cannon batteries, and a short-range air defense missile battery organized into six company-size strongpoints and distributed over three small towns and the partially forested, hilly area surrounding them. If Reagan could destroy the strongpoints and the associated C3 network and control the key terrain, the brigade defense would largely collapse. A string of ground reconnaissance elements maintained a number of forward outposts and four other enemy strongpoints. An enemy reserve company was outside the OA, but it was close enough to affect the attack. The brigade would act to isolate the nearby strongpoints and fix the reserve company from responding, while division fires conducted preemptive counterfire to destroy the cannon batteries. The battalion would have the responsibility of avoiding or sweeping away the enemy covering force and responding to the enemy's mortars with its own organic target acquisition and indirect-fire systems.

As Reagan collaborated on options with his staff, subordinate commanders monitored their discussion on the command "electronic whiteboard." Noticing the XO's and S3's smiles as they exchanged glances, Reagan asked, "OK, what's the inside joke?"

"Well sir," replied the S3, "It does not seem quite fair to the enemy. This is the first major battle in an AO where we have never deployed before, but it is not really new. The battalion has trained against similar dispersed, strongpoint-based, defensive dispositions at the National Training Center and at the new Joint Urban Warfare Training Center. Plus, all of our training scenarios incorporated some mix of unconventional and asymmetric threats. In addition, during sea deployment, our en route mission planning and rehearsal system applications permitted us to run virtual exercises against this very enemy division on real-world digitized terrain in the same general area as our current objective. Virtual exercises are not the same as fighting, of course, but there is no question we have already acquired a high level of knowledge and familiarity with the enemy, the terrain, and the overall operating environment before we have to fight."

"Those are good points and good reasons for all of us to feel confident, but not overconfident," Reagan cautioned. "That certainly bears out how important it is to train as we fight. But, as long as I am reviewing fundamentals, I want to reinforce three essential operational themes that have been critical to our training and exercise program and that will be critical to this attack."

As a former tactics instructor at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Reagan never passed up a chance to teach his team. "First point, gentleman: *knowledge is paramount***.** The battalion has to maintain a high level of situational understanding, with frequent updates to the COP during execution. Information superiority is the key to optimizing every other battalion capability. Remember that. Timely situation updates will help the 1st Battalion to avoid surprise and to exploit the quality of firsts—the ability to see first, understand first, act first, and finish decisively. Being first in these areas because of what we know gives us a home-court advantage.

"Second, *freedom of action***.** The battalion must retain freedom of action during its attack. We must force the enemy to react to our actions and to the supporting actions of the brigade and the division. We must control the tempo of this engagement, and we must adapt rapidly to changing battlefield conditions, adjusting our plan in-stride, if necessary. The enemy will try to slow us down then tie us down. We must anticipate his actions. Will he use dismounted infantry, obstacles, reconnaissance elements, antiarmor ambushes, and precision-fire strikes? We must avoid, blind, neutralize, or destroy threats from stand-off distances. Higher echelon fires will also help us avoid being bogged down and will support maneuver.

"Third: speed, mobility, and power equals momentum plus protection. Our task forces will capitalize on the speed and mobility of the FCS system of systems to move rapidly on multiple axes, exploiting the inevitable seams between the enemy's strongpoints. As seen many times during training exercises, speed combined with stealth provides inherent protection against enemy fires and often serves to overwhelm and paralyze his forces. Combining speed, mobility, and the power of organic direct and indirect fires will generate the momentum needed for rapid decision and will place the enemy at a disadvantage during final close combat assault against his strongpoint positions."

US paratrooper with Saudi national guardsmen during the early days of Operation Desert Shield, August 1990.

US Army

Intelligence from a variety of complementary sources from national- to theater-level satellites; manned aerial reconnaissance; UAVs; in-country SOF; HN sources; all forms of electronic and signals intelligence; and information from nongovernment and private volunteer organizations that remained in country had been integrated to rapidly develop the required knowledge base. Once deployed, the brigade employed its own considerable sensor networks, HUMINT, and air-ground RSTA assets to thicken the brigade COP.

The Tactical Infosphere

The tactical infosphere is the layered, integrated network of information and communications capabilities required to support effective tactical operations, as well as the information it provides. To ensure "decision dominance," tactical commanders need fully networked communications that have access to the global information grid (GIG) that provides real-time situational awareness and targeting information. Furthermore, the networks need connectivity with joint, theater, and national sources, and have reachback assets on the GIG. The tactical infosphere requires wider bandwidth; robust, self-organizing, self-healing communication architecture; and an integrated, distributed, virtual database that is computer intensive, with smart routers and multilevel security protocols.[2]

Reagan and his subordinate leaders had confidence in their current level of situational understanding without, however, assuming that their knowledge was either perfect or complete. The JTF had begun building the infosphere required to support contingency operations even before deployment began. Intelligence from a variety of complementary sources from national- to theater-level satellites; manned aerial reconnaissance; UAVs; in-country SOF; HN sources; all forms of electronic and signals intelligence; and information from nongovernment and private volunteer organizations that remained in country had been integrated to rapidly develop the required knowledge base.

Once deployed, the brigade employed its own considerable sensor networks, HUMINT, and air-ground RSTA assets to thicken the brigade COP. Reagan's scouts and organic UAVs had also been busy, focusing on discriminating between decoy and actual enemy dispositions; locating enemy dismounted infantry, reconnaissance, MANPADS, and antiarmor;

and establishing information exchanges with local police and U.S. SOF. As the commander, Reagan keenly felt the responsibility for managing his organic ISR assets as effectively as possible to ensure no significant gaps in information occurred to stall the attack.

Reagan continued to stress the importance of situational understanding: "Team, take a moment and see if we have any major information shortfalls. S2?"

"Sir, we have been focused on the commander's critical information requirements (CCIR), expecting to go on the offensive. Between our feeds to brigade and higher, our local sources, and employment of our own assets, I believe we have reliably identified primary danger areas; movement chokepoints; new and old obstacles; best routes to specific subunit objectives; protected positions for tactical standoff fires; and likely assailable flanks of enemy strongpoints. Daily all-source updates have helped us discern small patterns in the enemy's activities and changes in his dispositions and strengths. We have good visibility on conditions within the three villages, including blocked streets and many hardened fighting positions, with much of the information coming from SOF and HN sources. Our enemy COP also depicts the reconnaissance outposts that we will have to blind or take down. I have to say, however, that there are dismounted elements and some dispersed antiarmor teams in the battalion AO that we have not located. Plus, the enemy has concealed his mortars well. We probably will not locate those assets until he uses them."

Reagan [organized] his battalion into four combined arms teams, each maneuvering independently on separate axes to designated unit objectives within OA Alpha, with a single platoon in battalion reserve. Mainly employing secondary and off-road approaches, the four axes could get close enough for the separate columns to provide mutual support while presenting no large lucrative target to invite an enemy fire strike.

"All right, commanders, staff, the S2 just told you what else we need to know." Reagan's battle staff captains were well trained in keeping the COP updated and in adjusting ISR assets to respond to changes in CCIR.

Once the battle began, Reagan intended to push his organic UAVs aloft and seed key areas and routes with remotely delivered sensors, re-seeding as the attack progressed. He also had a string on brigade-controlled Comanche and armed UAV systems for both reconnaissance and attack of a number of suspected enemy reverse-slope positions and hard-to-strike urban targets. He could also employ the Comanche as an ISR and joint fires integrator against any attempts by the enemy to reinforce his defense or to conduct countermaneuver.

Given this analysis, Reagan decided to organize his battalion into four combined arms teams, each maneuvering independently on separate axes to designated unit objectives within OA Alpha, with a single platoon in battalion reserve. Mainly employing secondary and off-road approaches, the four axes could get close enough for the separate columns to provide mutual support while presenting no large lucrative target to invite an enemy fire strike. Reagan surmised that the multiple axes would also serve to confuse the enemy regarding the battalion's specific objectives and to complicate enemy acquisition and engagement.

With the brigade fires/effects coordination center, Reagan's fires/effects team planned to use a mix of suppression and obscuration fires along each route against covering forces and danger areas to protect and facilitate movement. The automated fire planning system, with its configurable horizontal and vertical linkages, provided real-time visibility on the entire brigade fires/effects system and linked them to joint systems. Scouts and UAVs would precede each task force as additional eyes forward to provide early warning of new threats and to pass new targeting data through direct sensor-shooter linkages to battalion long-range shooters, as well as to the uncommitted 6th Battalion for supporting fires.

"What about obstacles?" Reagan asked.

The S3 quickly answered, "Most of the known obstacles can be bypassed given the superior mobility of the Future Combat System. However, these two minefields [he points them out], which cannot be avoided, will be neutralized from standoff with overpressure or nonlethal munitions. We have balanced organic mobility support across the combined arms team to deal with unforeseen obstacles. We can also call on brigade bridging and breaching assets although those elements are currently allocated in direct support of the 3d and 6th Battalions. Also, we need to remind all elements to scan the bypass routes for new obstacles before using them. Offensively, the division will emplace artillery-delivered minefields, with 8-hour active sensors, to support our maneuver and to canalize the enemy, as shown on the overlay. Plus, we have sufficient NETFIRES remote munitions to put in two temporary nonlethal obstacles—nonlethal because of the urban population in the OA—on call, if we need to."

Reagan had confidence that each combined arms team commander was well versed in the tactics,

techniques, and procedures of combining standoff fires from protected positions en route with rapid closure against assigned final objectives from positions of advantage. In many cases, the fast-moving elements were likely to pass other small, decentralized enemy teams before they could respond effectively. On-board dazzlers and the FCS active-protection system had proven in the past to reduce the threat from LOS antiarmor that they might encounter.

Given the enemy's dispositions in depth, Reagan expected that each team would have to deploy from march formation several times en route to and within the objective area in order to overcome enemy forward elements and outposts. In addition, per Donnelly's direction, Reagan specifically instructed his commanders to engage and destroy any C2 or signal nodes and air defense capabilities discovered en route. Doing so would systematically strip the enemy of his capabilities for battle command and would reduce the surface-to-air threat to air assault and to aerial supply movements in support of the brigade overall. As Reagan completed his order, he stressed that it was key to avoid becoming bogged down or decisively engaged in advance of final objectives.

"Gentlemen, the toughest part of the engagement will be the destruction of the enemy strongpoints anchored in the three villages. Your fighting teams must still be fresh for that part of the fight. Consistent with the brigade order and beginning the movement several hours before dawn, the battalion attack will be synchronized. The task forces should close on unit objectives more or less simultaneously and initiate the close combat battle for the three villages and adjacent complex terrain a couple of hours before night falls.

"Clearing the enemy from his positions in built-up areas is going to be time-consuming and complex. I want each team commander to brief back on how you see your piece unfolding. Where are the seams and entry points to create positional advantage? How are you going to sequence this part of the fight to break down the strongpoints? In particular, review with me how you plan to combine mounted and dismounted modes and how you will employ organic direct and indirect fires for reinforcing and complementary effects.

"Action of networked teams will be centrally important. Their effectiveness will depend largely on how well you maintain responsive linkages with supporting fire systems and make effective use of sensors, robotic scouts, urban micro-UAVs, and soldier knowledge systems. Maximize use of nonlethal engagement systems where you have any doubts about noncombatants; the enemy will try to shield himself with civilians and civilian structures. Make sure platoon leaders are prepared to call for the armed UAVs and Comanches for flanking and rear fires within the towns and in complex terrain. There will be some delay there, but not much. Finally, driving the enemy outside the city and finishing him there will reduce collateral damage and save civilian lives.

The application of joint fires and resourcesis descending the echelons. If in the past it has been rare to employ joint assets at battalion level, it might [soon] well become more routine. . . . These developments constitute important new challenges. . . . . The quality of leaders of soldiers and the excellence of small units will determine the rise in effectiveness of the Objective Force.

"We are only going to hold the towns for a few hours. Host-nation units will follow up in a stability role, but be sure to avoid friendly-fire mishaps or give any enemy remnants opportunities to hurt us during the hand-off."

Reagan was more than satisfied with his selected COA, which optimized his battalion's strengths. Brigade and higher shaping actions would help set conditions for attack by destroying or neutralizing high-value enemy capabilities and high-payoff targets, particularly elements that comprised his precision-engagement and mobile-strike capabilities—aviation, artillery, target acquisition, and C3 capabilities. Also, supporting fires would fix reserve forces in place; isolate battalion objective areas; strip away enemy reconnaissance and intelligence assets; and protect battalion maneuver. All of the enemy forces that might affect his attack would be effectively suppressed, blinded, or destroyed. Moreover, any effort by the enemy to withdraw from defensive positions to disengage or conduct countermaneuver would expose those forces to observation and withering precision fires.

Undoubtedly, during the engagement, circumstances would force alteration of the attack plan. That was routine and expected. No plan survives contact. Reagan's task force commanders all understood his intent, had the capability to synchronize their activities in stride, and would exercise initiative, according to the principles of mission command, to adjust without orders to new information and changing battlefield conditions.

The Outcome

To describe a decisive rout of the enemy as the end of the story would be too easy and ultimately self-serving. More useful and instructive is to take note of several enduring factors likely to influence the outcome of the battle for OA Alpha.

The enemy has a vote in every battle. A thinking, creative, adaptive enemy has an even larger vote, even when it faces a technologically superior foe. In our scenario, any number of enemy counters might slow or compromise U.S. success: the use by the enemy of nuclear, biological, and chemical capabilities on any scale; the successful degradation of U.S. situational understanding; the exposure of significant numbers of civilians to injury or death; the introduction of technical surprise; or the use of other unanticipated asymmetric responses. In short, although the advanced capabilities envisioned for the Objective Force would certainly introduce significant changes to ground operations, the enemy's own innovation and reactions must be anticipated and accounted for.

The tactical concept described here is highly complex and significantly more complex than existing doctrine. Achieving it would place demands on future leaders and soldiers that substantially exceed today's demands. Clearly, the Army's training and leader development systems must evolve at the same pace as the Objective Force so to produce leaders and units that can—

- Direct organic combined arms capabilities at levels below battalion.
- Operate autonomously and noncontiguously over expanded distances.
- Manage and exploit a much larger flow of information.
- Meet the challenges of urban warfare as a routine operating environment.
- Transition from one engagement to the next without a significant pause.
- Transition smoothly between the four primary forms of operations: offensive, defensive, stability, and support.

The application of joint fires and resources is descending the echelons. If in the past it has been rare to employ joint assets at battalion level, it might well become more routine in the future. Collectively, these developments constitute important new challenges. Ultimately, the quality of leaders of soldiers and the excellence of small units will determine the rise in effectiveness of the Objective Force.

Overemphasizing the significance of information and knowledge to the Objective Force tactical concept would be difficult. Maintaining information superiority and situational understanding shared through a COP and updated by a variety of means during the course of the operation are essential elements of the tactical concept. Superior, reliable, timely, actionable information enhances the effectiveness of all capabilities embedded within the FCS combat battalion and Objective Force combined arms brigade. Rather than guessing about the enemy forces' (and one's own) having knowledge, albeit imperfect, is critical to more efficient use of battle resources and capabilities; to the conduct of precision maneuver; to the ability to conduct simultaneous and subsequent engagements; and of course, to the survivability of the force. Knowledge permits the commander to pursue the most profitable fights, which in turn, will lead to achieving accelerated decision in battle and to dislocating, destroying, and disintegrating the enemy force.

The Army's effort to develop the Objective Force unreservedly highlights the continuing need to close with and destroy enemy forces. Although the definition of close combat is changing to include a broader geographic scope and the continuous combination of LOS and NLOS engagements by mounted and dismounted forces, the future Army must always be prepared for the "short sword" fight in situations where the enemy chooses to stand and fight to the end. ***MR***

Lieutenant Colonel Scott R. McMichael, U.S. Army, Retired, is a senior concept developer at U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). He received a B.A. from Davidson College, an M.A. from the University of Chicago, and he is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and the U.S. Army Russian Institute. His articles have appeared in Army, Parameters, *and Jane's Intelligence Review, and he is the author of* Stumbling Bear: Soviet Military Performance in Afghanistan *(New York: Brassey's, 1991). He has served in various command and staff positions in the continental United States (CONUS) and Germany.*

Colonel Peter J. Zielinski is the director of the Joint and Army Concepts Directorate, DSCDOC. He received a B.S. from the University of Notre Dame, an M.A. from the University of Akron, and is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College. He has served in various command and staff positions, including chief, Training and Doctrine, WIDD, U.S. Army Field Artillery School, Fort Sill; commander, 3/174 (FA) Training Support Battalion, Fort Drum; and he was an instructor for the Center for Army Tactics, CGSC.

Colonel Brian Zahn is Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Doctrine, Headquarters, TRADOC, Fort Monroe. He received a B.A. from the U.S. Military Academy, an M.B.A. from the University of Georgia, Athens, and he is a U.S. Army War College Fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has served in various command and staff positions in CONUS, Hawaii, and Germany.